

Wofabe: African Dance and Drum Festival

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MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of *Wofabe: African Dance and Drum Festival* is to preserve and share the finest traditions of African dance and drumming; to encourage cross-cultural understanding; to celebrate traditional African culture, aesthetics and values as resources for all people; and to utilize the resources and information gathered to further promote the African art forms in New Jersey.



Festival Goals and Objectives

Goals

1. To teach, learn and exchange historical information on specific aspects of African culture as it pertains to dance, music and drumming.
2. To introduce and present African dance/drum instructors to the New Jersey community.
3. To identify African dance resources existing in New Jersey (i.e. performance groups, instructors, venues, festivals, presenters, etc.)
4. To establish a network and develop a database of teachers of African dance and drumming.
5. To showcase the talents of renown quality African dance and drum ensembles.



Objectives

1. Demonstrate the powerful relationship and inter-connectedness between these art forms and people of all cultural backgrounds.
2. Create a positive outlet for youth by demonstrating that African dancing and drumming is for people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds.
3. Increase community education and awareness of these important art forms
4. Gather and share information on the available resources.
5. Provide outlets for performing artists and groups working in these art forms to share their talents with their peers and the community-at-large.

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African dance is a form of communication that is deeply rooted in the language, history and culture of African peoples. As one examines this art form, we see that dance is an essential part of African life, incorporated into almost every facet of culture: art, politics, religion, marriage, war, etc.



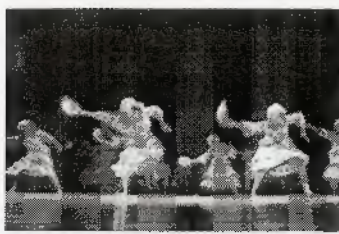
Wofabe will examine traditional African dance, how traditions have evolved and how they have been reinterpreted by contemporary artists. Panel discussions on African dance and drumming, along with dance/drum workshops/classes with teachers from Guinea, Senegal and the Ivory Coast and the Congo

The Festival will also present an evening concert highlighting West African dance and drum companies from New Jersey and New York. The concert will feature professional adult companies, and pre-professional youth companies.

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The festival is an opportunity for people, particularly young women and girls to learn more about their culture and history. The festival will provide positive alternatives to the youth and their families as they unite in a creative form of expression via dance, music and song. It is important to pass on the tradition and culture to young people, in particular, and the community at large to continue the African dancing and drumming tradition and legacy in New Jersey.



Dancers and drummers travel to New York on a regular basis to take classes however not everyone has the opportunity, time or resources to travel to New York to study. Although we are fortunate to have talented teachers from all parts of Africa living and working in New York, rarely do we have the opportunity to present them in New Jersey. It is our desire to make the art form accessible to artists, students and patrons living and working in New Jersey. Based on our research and attendance at several African dance and drum conferences in Washington, DC, Massachusetts, Vermont, Chicago, and New York, it was determined that there is a need for a Festival of this type for patrons who live and work in New Jersey.

One would be remiss, when discussing African drumming, to overlook the contributions of Nigerian-born, Grammy Award-winning master percussionist Babatunde Olatunji (1927-2003) whose teachings, recordings and performances have had a major impact on various genres of music. His artistry has influenced a plethora of musicians for decades from Carlos Santana to Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead with whom he shared his Grammy.

And finally, it is important to pass on the tradition and culture to young people, in particular, and the community at large to continue the African dancing and drumming tradition and legacy in New Jersey.

Background - Umoja Dance Company was established in 1993 by Karen L. Love. "Umoja" is the Kiswahili for unity. Umoja has been recognized as one of New Jersey's premier dance companies. The youth company, Usaama Dance Company, was founded by Ms. Love in 1995 to give young people a sense of pride in their culture and in themselves and a sense of respect for the arts through dance.

Umoja creates a nurturing environment that encourages cross-cultural exchange and celebrates accessibility to the human spirit. Innovative, dynamic, rhythmic gestures are the essence of our creative style. Through ongoing

research of African culture, aesthetic and values and the fusion of contemporary, modern and West African styles, we continue to enhance our performances.

Umoja encourages innovative approaches to movement and promotes collaboration among various artists and cultures. Umoja offers full-length concerts, classes,



residencies, open workshops, interactive programs, master classes and lecture demonstrations. Our educational outreach encompasses open dialogue among children, artists and audiences to celebrate our commonalities and our differences.

Among our outstanding accomplishments was a performance at Aaron Davis Hall as part of the New Vision/New Voices Choreography Showcase for People of Color and the E-Moves Choreography Showcase. Umoja has performed in the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors festival and was presented as part of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center's Kwanzaa Festival for two consecutive years.

Additionally, Umoja has performed at Duke University, Montclair State University, Dance Theater Workshop FRESHTRACKS, Symphony Space Dance Sampler, SUNY Purchase, Newark Symphony Hall, Essex County College's Mary Burch Theatre, Luna Stage Company, Rutgers University, Union County College, Montclair High School, the Baird Community Center (South Orange) and the annual Montclair African American Heritage Day Festival.

In a desire to make these art forms (African dance, music and drumming) accessible to

artists, students and patrons living and working in New Jersey, Umoja launched **Wofabe: African Dance and Drum Festival** in 2006. It was the first of its kind in New Jersey. Dancers and drummers travel to New York on a regular basis to take classes, but not everyone has the opportunity, time or resources to travel to New York to study. Although we are fortunate to have talented teachers from all parts of Africa living and working in New York, rarely do we have the opportunity to present them in New Jersey. The Wofabe: African Dance and Drum Festival was first held October 20 & 21, 2006 at Arts High School in Newark, NJ. And returned to that venue for Year Two of the festival, which was held in October 2007. Year Three took place at the newly built Science Park High School in Newark, New Jersey during October 2008. For Year Four, Newark Symphony Hall will host the Festival on the Saturday November 21, 2009. With the proposed fourth annual African dance and drum festival, we seek to expand on the success of the previous years, each of which saw audiences of over 400 people who came from as far away as Texas and Bermuda.

It is important, in our view, to pass on the tradition and culture to young people, in particular, and to the community at large to foster the African dancing and drumming tradition and legacy in New Jersey. The New Jersey-based community is small and we continually expand our programs to meet the needs of communities seeking training in this genre. Experiencing such training first hand, even for a brief weekend, is hoped to be a catalyst to expanding personal development. Our youth are in need of positive outlets and reflections of their rich culture. We believe we fulfill this need.

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4. Gather and share information on the available resources.
5. Provide an outlet for groups and individuals, working in these disciplines, to share their talents with their peers and the community at large.

How will you evaluate the successes and shortcomings of the project?

The Festival will be evaluated by Dr. Doris Walker-Bennett who will provide a written report from her findings. The evaluation process will measure the following:

- Relevance of the workshop/panel discussion topics;
- Quality of the workshop presenters, workshops, classes, and performances; usefulness of the packets distributed to the workshop participants;
- Effectiveness of the Festival coordinator in adhering to the festival's daily schedule;
- Effectiveness of marketing and press efforts based upon the assessment of news stories and ticket sales results;
- Amount of knowledge gained by festival participants on African dance, drumming & culture;
- Information will be gathered for evaluation purposes using surveys, interviews and video tape.

The analysis of the evaluations and surveys from 2006 - 2008 Festivals have been used in the planning of our 2009 Festival.